

PUBLIC INFORMATION STATEMENT  
NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE MIAMI FL  
1000 AM EST MON MAR 2 2009

...DRIEST WINTER ON RECORD OVER PARTS OF SOUTH FLORIDA...  
...FIRE DANGER EXTREMELY HIGH...

February continued the extended period of extreme dryness across most of south Florida as the area remained stuck in a very dry weather pattern. As was the case in January, several cold fronts passed through the area last month. However, atmospheric conditions were not conducive for significant rainfall in advance of these weather systems. As a result, February 2009 went on record as one of the driest Februaries on record at several south Florida locations. These include West Palm Beach which for the second month in a row recorded a record dry month, Miami International Airport which recorded its fifth driest February, Miami Beach which recorded its fourth driest February and Naples which recorded its seventh driest February.

Here are some totals for February along with departures from normal and driest all time February rank:

SITE	FEB 2009 PRECIP	DEPARTURE	RANK
MIAMI INTERNATIONAL	0.12	- 1.95	5TH
MIAMI BEACH	0.12	- 2.02	4TH
PALM BEACH INTERNATIONAL	0.14	- 2.41	1ST
FORT LAUDERDALE INTL	0.22	- 2.48	7TH
NAPLES REGIONAL	0.31	- 1.86	7TH
MOORE HAVEN	0.39	- 1.68	14TH

The three-month rainfall totals including the months of December 2008 and January and February 2009 ranked as the lowest on record at several locations. Miami and Fort Lauderdale recorded their driest December-February on record, with West Palm Beach, Naples and Miami Beach having their second driest all time winter period. Following are the winter (December-February) totals, departure from normal and driest all time rank:

SITE	PRECIP SINCE DEC 1	DEPARTURE	RANK
MIAMI INTERNATIONAL	0.74	- 5.46	1ST
PALM BEACH INTERNATIONAL	2.01	- 7.70	2ND
FORT LAUDERDALE INTL	0.39	- 7.97	1ST
NAPLES REGIONAL	1.07	- 4.70	2ND
MIAMI BEACH	0.62	- 6.04	2ND
MOORE HAVEN	2.65	- 3.17	21ST

Going back to November 1, 2008, the eastern half of south Florida has received less than 25 percent of the average rainfall for this period, with most western areas at 25 to 40 percent of normal. At Miami and Naples, the percent of normal rainfall since November 1 is at 18 percent, at West Palm Beach it is 20 percent, at Miami Beach it is 15 percent and at Fort Lauderdale International it is an incredibly low 8 percent. Moore Haven has a slightly higher percentage of 36 percent compared to normal since November.

South Florida continues under the influence of the large scale La Niña pattern which is one of the likely causes of the prolonged and extreme dryness this winter. This pattern typically leads to mostly dry cold frontal passages followed by periods of cool and dry air, thereby limiting the potential for significant rainfall across the South Florida peninsula. This pattern has occurred in past years, most notably in 1971, 1985 and 1989.

The very dry conditions have led to extremely high fire danger over all of south Florida. The normal start of the south Florida wildfire season is in March, but the extremely high values currently being observed are well ahead of schedule and have already led to a significant number of small wildfires over the region. The combination of these factors means that eastern metro areas of south Florida are under severe drought conditions, with moderate drought conditions elsewhere except in the Naples area where abnormally dry conditions are noted.

The outlook for March through May is for continued drier than normal conditions as La Niña is expected to persist through this period. These expected dry conditions will further exacerbate the wildfire threat over the region, and fire danger levels are likely to remain extremely high during the next 3 months. During the very dry winter and spring seasons of 1985 and 1989, a combined total of over a million acres were burned as a result of wildfires. With a similar lack of rainfall expected this spring, wildfires could once again become a big concern for all South Floridians. All persons are strongly urged to heed all bans on burning and take measures to prevent wildfires during the next few months.

For further information on this developing situation, please visit the National Weather Service Miami website at [WWW.WEATHER.GOV/MIAMI](http://WWW.WEATHER.GOV/MIAMI).

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